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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: RESPONSE TO FREEDOM OF
MEDIA REPRESENTATIVE REPORT ON NOVEMBER 27, 2008

1. (U) Post is authorized to present the following statement
at the November 27th Permanent Council meeting in Vienna.

Begin text:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is a pleasure to welcome you back to back to the Permanent
Council today, Mr. Haraszti. Your report is, as always, a
valuable reality check on how we are meeting our commitments
to media freedom. In this respect, there are several points
to make.

The office of the Representative for Freedom of the Media
(RFOM) continues to do valuable work. It tirelessly promotes
media-freedom best practices. It conducts valuable training
activities, either in support of projects of OSCE field
missions or through its annual regional media conferences in
Central Asia and the south Caucasus regions. It reminds us
all of our commitments and puts a spotlight on problems as
they occur. It provides excellent consultative services like
legal reviews and assessment visits that are guideposts for
"doing the right thing" when participating States are so
inclined.

In this regard, we commend Montenegro in particular for its
open, constructive approach to its media freedom commitments
and its cooperation with RFOM on the productive assessment
visit included with this report.

For all this, the United States thanks you, Mr. Haraszti, and
your small, dedicated staff. Please continue to do what you
do so well. You are promoting freedom as a building block of
security, a concept that we participating States have
affirmed in consensus documents that stretch back to the
Helsinki Accords.

But your job also means identifying areas of serious concern.
Foremost is the problem of violence against media workers.
You rightly note that these occurrences are "acts aimed to
undermine the basic democratic value of free expression."
Your report notes several newly occurring cases and many
other cases, either unresolved or unsatisfactorily dealt with
in several participating States. Creating a climate of
physical security and respect for independent opinion is the
task in each of our countries. We should all take seriously
and address the concerns cited in this report.

The subject of violence leads us to one important new
development since your last report: the war in Georgia.
Perhaps the most fitting memorial to journalists who lost
their lives in the war zone is to honor their service by
permitting safe and unimpeded media access to all the
affected areas. Restoring the free flow of information in the
area of conflict can be a critical confidence-building
measure. We look to the occupying forces and the de facto
authorities in the South Ossetian and Abkhazian regions of
Georgia to allow unrestricted media access to all areas under
their control. Unrestricted access for reporters is essential
in determining the truth of what occurred during the war and

its aftermath.

Your report also points to instances where new broadcasting laws and regulations, including changes in licensing requirements, or implementation of existing laws are under consideration. New technologies like digital broadcasting and existing laws should not be used as an excuse to restrict the public's existing access to plural news sources. The United States agrees with you that the relevant OSCE commitment is "to safeguard effective pluralism of the media landscape in all of the participating States."

Finally, we note your report's concerns about proposed new defamation laws, which have the effect of inhibiting journalistic freedom. We hope that the countries noted in this report will work with you in addressing these observations in line with commitments made in the OSCE, including during last year's Madrid Ministerial.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
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